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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 001470

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/09/2016

TAGS: PGOV TH TRT SNAP

SUBJECT: THAILAND POLITICAL UPDATE: EXPLOSION NEAR PRIVY COUNCILLOR'S RESIDENCE; DEMONSTRATION AT THE SINGAPORE EMBASSY

REF: BANGKOK 1445 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RALPH BOYCE. REASON: 1.4 (D)

11. (U) Summary: An explosion at a police box near the residence of Privy Council Chairman General Prem Tinsulanonda on March 9 afternoon has reportedly injured two persons. No motive or suspects have been found at this point. Privy Councillor General Surayud Chulanont on March 8 called for Thaksin and his opponents to establish a dialogue in order to end the current political turmoil. The anti-Thaksin People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) mounted peaceful demonstrations at the Singapore Embassy and the Thai Stock Exchange office. End summary.

EXPLOSION NEAR PREM'S HOUSE

12. (U) An explosion at an unoccupied police box near the residence of Privy Council Chairman General Prem Tinsulanonda on March 9 afternoon reportedly injured two persons. Police sources tell us that the booth was not dedicated to security for General Prem and had not been used for a year. Those injured are believed to have been passersby. No motive or suspects have been found at this point.

PRIVY COUNCIL MEMBER URGES DIALOGUE

13. (U) On March 8, Privy Councillor and former armed forces Supreme Commander General Surayud Chulanont issued a call for Prime Minister Thaksin and his opponents to sit down and find a solution to the current impasse. Surayud said that he supported Police Spokesman Pol. Gen. Achirawit Suwanphesat's earlier call (Bangkok 1445) for both sides to reconsider their stances.

DEMOCRATS TIRED, BUT STILL FIGHTING

14. (SBU) At a dinner at the Ambassador's residence for visiting DAS John on March 8, several members of the boycotting Democrat Party discussed the political situation. They focused on the bubbling resentment over the PM's Shin Corp deal, insisting that their research had uncovered violations of law that were not being addressed in the legal system due to the PM's abuse of power. We asked one whether he really thought that these highly technical accusations would have much resonance with the voting public. He agreed that these might be "technicalities" but said they were worth pursuing. "They got Al Capone on a technicality."

15. (C) Meanwhile, another Thai guest challenged the Democrats to articulate what they stood for -- besides being against Thaksin. The Democrat responded, "We won't be populist." (Comment: thus demonstrating the mostly negative nature of their party position. End Comment.) More substantively, they discussed the problems with some of TRT's most popular programs. The 30-Baht health program allows anyone to visit a government health facility and pay only 30 baht (75 cents) per visit. The Democrats argue that this is unsustainable and the benefit should be limited to the really needy. They criticized the village investment funds, the "million cow program" and other government give-aways as patronizing to the rural public, and an economic dead end that keeps them dependent on government handouts rather than providing real income growth. They also agreed, however, that their party had done a very poor job in the last election articulating their platform.

DEMONSTRATORS MARCH ON SINGAPORE EMBASSY AND STOCK EXCHANGE OFFICE

16. (U) On March 9 a crowd of about 800 demonstrators marched on the Singapore Embassy and later to the Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) office. This was far less than the "thousands" promised by PAD earlier in the week. The Singapore Embassy told us that the crowd was peaceful. Outside the SET office across from the American Embassy, the demonstrators heard anti-Temasek sale speeches and chanted anti-Thaksin slogans.

BOYCE